

# Taking Care of Ourselves

## CONSULTANT/ TRAINER GUIDE



## Introduction

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) is intended to support caregivers' increased awareness and understanding of the impact of their interactions on a child's social-emotional (SE) development. It aims to build the capacity (improve the ability) of caregivers (providers and families) to prevent, identify, and reduce the impact of mental health problems among children from birth to age 6 and their families. Consultation also serves as an effective strategy to support the social-emotional health and well-being of both young children and the caregivers themselves.

The "Taking Care of Ourselves" workshop materials and booklets are tools designed to support the work of early childhood mental health consultants to promote the well-being of providers and parents. Using these materials focused on stress and stress management, consultants can help caregivers take care of themselves in ways that, in turn, help them to be more responsive to the young children in their care. The workshop materials and booklets provide an intentional and structured learning experience for both parents and providers, and can be used as a personal as well as professional development activity.

## Background Information

While there is not one definition of stress, we define stress as a *physical, mental or emotional response to events that cause bodily or mental tension*. Stress can come from a situation or even a thought that makes you feel frustrated, nervous, anxious or angry. Stress can be a good thing, helping an individual focus on a task or perform at a higher level. Stress can also be harmful, having a negative impact on your body and mind's ability to deal with a present situation; this is the kind of stress caregivers should try to limit and learn to manage in a healthy way.

Providing care to young children is an intense and demanding job. It can become increasingly difficult when combined with relationship, financial or other stressful concerns. Many forms of harsh discipline and neglect come about because caregivers are stressed and lack the appropriate supports to manage their stressors in a more healthy way. Harsh and inconsistent discipline has been shown to lead to increases in children's challenging behavior—which in turn can lead to more stress for the caregivers.



Additionally, a large body of research suggests that our attachment bonds—that is, babies’ first love relationships formed with primary caregivers—have deep and lasting effects on their ability to manage stress, communicate with body language, stay tuned-in to their emotions, and easily forgive or let go of grudges as adults. The quality of these primary relationships is heavily dependent upon a caregivers’ physical and mental well-being, and shapes the basis for all future relationships. It is therefore, critical that caregivers are able to: 1) focus on meeting their own needs and the needs of the child simultaneously; and 2) appropriately manage stress so that it does not adversely affect the relationship between the child and themselves.

The table on the right outlines some common signs and symptoms of stress.

COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF STRESS	
COGNITIVE	EMOTIONAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Memory problems</li> <li>• Inability to concentrate</li> <li>• Continuous worrying</li> <li>• Racing thoughts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling down</li> <li>• Feeling overwhelmed</li> <li>• High level of irritability (short temper)</li> <li>• Inability to relax</li> </ul>
PHYSICAL	BEHAVIORAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excessive perspiration</li> <li>• Chest pains/ elevated heart rate</li> <li>• Frequent colds or illness</li> <li>• Nausea, dizziness or headaches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase or decrease in appetite</li> <li>• Nervous habits (nail biting)</li> <li>• Difficulty sleeping or irregular sleep patterns</li> <li>• Using alcohol, cigarettes or drugs excessively</li> </ul>

- Better understanding their stressors and signs of stress
- Identify and use techniques to lessen their levels of stress
- Develop an individualized action plan for managing stress

focusing on one section of the PowerPoint and booklet at a time.

**Please Note:**

- The times allotted for the full workshop and inservice sessions are estimated.
- **Keeping a Stress Log** is intended as a home work activity. If offering the training as three 20-30 minute inservice sessions, this activity takes place between Sessions 2 and 3. If offering the training as one 60-90 minute workshop, this activity may be used as a take-home follow-up assignment for continued work on stress recognition and reduction. Lastly, this activity could be considered as optional. In any case, trainers should adjust the PowerPoint presentation (delete slides) as needed depending on how to incorporate or opting to eliminate this learning activity.
- Review the important Trainer Tips at the end of this document.

## Audience

This workshop can be used with either groups of parents or groups of providers who care for young children ages birth to three years.

## Goal and Objectives of the Workshop

The overall goal of the Taking Care of Ourselves workshop is to assist caregivers (providers and parents) in managing their day-to-day stress in a way that nurtures their physical and emotional needs and, in turn, those of the children ages birth-three in their care. The learning objectives for the workshop focus on helping caregivers to:

## Three 30 Minute Inservice Sessions or One 90 Minute Workshop

The workshop materials and Taking Care of Ourselves booklets are intended to be used together in either of two options—three 20-30 minute inservice sessions or one 60-90 minute workshop. The training format is left to the discretion of the trainer and the option that fits best for participants. Given the demands of caregiver schedules and parent availability, it may be more desirable to divide the workshop learning experience into **three sessions**,



## Agenda of the Workshop

### PART 1 Understanding Stress

- Understand the definition of stress
- Identify common sources of stress
- Describe your personal sources and signs of stress

### PART 2 My Role in Stress Creation and Reduction

- Recognize the link between thoughts, behavior, and emotion
- Recognize the role of “control” in stress creations and reduction
- Understand your personal role in stress creation and reduction

### PART 3 My Individualized Action Plan

- Identify and practice techniques to lessen your level of stress at home and at work
- Create your Individualized Action Plan for managing stress

## Materials Checklist

- Laptop and LCD projector
- Flip chart and stand
- Markers
- “Taking Care of Ourselves” Booklets (provider and/or parent version)
- PowerPoint presentation. “Taking Care of Ourselves Stress Reduction Workshop”
- Presenter Notes: Included in Notes Pages view of the PowerPoint presentation
- Guides for Relaxation Exercise (See PowerPoint Notes Pages)
- Handouts:
  - PowerPoint presentation in Handouts format
  - Talk Back to Your Unhelpful Thoughts
  - Keeping a Stress Log (Optional)
  - A Dozen Posters to Combat Stress
  - Making a Praise Sandwich
  - Evaluation
- Stress balls or table toys (Optional)

## Important Trainer Tips

The workshop format is left to the discretion of the trainer and the option that fits best for participants. In either case, it is recommended that you prepare for using the workshop by taking the following steps:

1. Familiarize yourself with the background information and research components provided in the introduction of these notes, the content of the Taking Care of Ourselves booklets, the content in the PowerPoint presentation (*including the Notes Pages View material*), the handouts for participants, as well as the Dozen Posters to Combat Stress and recorded Relaxation exercises available on the Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation website at (<http://www.ecmhc.org/relaxation.html>).

2. Familiarize yourself with the Deep Breathing and Progressive Relaxation Exercise techniques found in Part 3 of the workshop. During the session you can use the Notes View of the PowerPoint presentation for the script to guide these exercises.
3. When working with families, offer take-home copies of the Dozen Posters to Combat Stress for them to take home. When working with providers, offer these posters as “graffiti” to be placed in prominent locations around the center/classroom for staff to access as reminders for and tips on stress management. Posters can be rotated every 2-4 weeks; and then a new one replaces it.
4. Be prepared to offer opportunities for individual consultation for families and providers who may wish to talk with you one-on-one about how they are coping with stress.

